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A Pragmatic Analysis of the Expression ʕafiah in Jordanian Spoken Arabic

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the pragmatic functions of ʕafiah (literally meaning health, well-being, or wholeness) in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA), using Levinson's pragmatic framework to examine its varied uses in context. For this purpose, the researchers compiled an initial list of situations in which ʕafiah is used. They based their selection on their knowledge as native speakers of JSA with the expression and their familiarity with the expression's usage. They then highlighted and explored the pragmatic function of ʕafiah in each context. Two Arabic language instructors validated the discovered functions and proposed changes to several of the situations and functions. The acceptability of the revised list was tested against the linguistic intuition of 40 native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. The findings revealed that ʕafiah serves twelve pragmatic functions, all related to expressing various emotions or attitudes: praise, happiness, approval, appreciation, mockery, disapproval, surprise, anger, frustration, annoyance, condemnation, and surrender. The study further showed that ʕafiah functions as a pragmatically versatile discourse marker, predominantly conveying negative rather than positive meanings. It concluded that context plays a pivotal role in understanding and interpreting the pragmatic meanings performed by ʕafiah in different socially grounded situations. Future studies should investigate the pragmatic meanings of ʕafiah across different Arabic dialects, such as Iraqi, Syrian, Yemeni, and others.

Keywords: Context; Discourse Markers; Pragmatic Functions; Jordanian Spoken Arabic; ʕafiah

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1. Introduction

Language is an absolute necessity of social life since it is the individual's primary means for expressing their needs and desires. In other words, it is the human vehicle not only for interacting with others and exchanging ideas but also for conveying opinions, feelings, and attitudes. Accordingly, it offers a significant number of linguistic devices that attain various functions across contexts in social communication, such as criticizing, apologizing, threatening, complaining, and many others. This indicates that every social situation has its own unique words, expressions, and phrases. However, it should be noted that the same word or expression might be used in different contexts to serve different functions, i.e., to be interpreted differently in each social context. Hence, it can be said that interlocutors make their own language choices according to the situation in which they are involved so as to be able to establish social relationships with those they are addressing.

The study of language use in authentic settings is the focus of pragmatics and discourse analysis, which emphasize not only the structural description of linguistic forms but also their intended communication effects and functional roles (Brown and Yule)^[1]. Pragmatics, in particular, has profoundly influenced linguistic research by redirecting attention toward the practical use of language and emphasizing the key role of context in interpretation (Levinson)^[2]. In this regard, context includes the time and place of interaction, as well as the identities, knowledge, beliefs, and intentions of both speakers and listeners. Instead of focusing only on the literal or propositional meaning of utterances, pragmatics emphasizes the speaker's intended meaning. As Yule^[3] explained, "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" (p. 3).

To this end, Fraser^[4] distinguished between two main types of meaning: content and pragmatic. Content meaning (the so-called referential meaning) refers to the literal interpretation of a sentence that describes a state of the world. In contrast, pragmatic meaning concerns the speaker's intention, focusing on the underlying message they want to communicate beyond the literal words used.

Moutaouakil^[5] maintained that pragmatic functions are assigned to linguistic elements based on particular situational

factors. Similarly, Davis^[6] highlighted the role of context in interpreting meaning, proposing that each sentence assumes a specific context in which it is appropriately applied. Consequently, analyzing the pragmatic role of a given expression requires considering its use across a range of distinct contextual scenarios. Alotaibi^[7] also stressed the significance of pragmatic competence, asserting that semantics and pragmatics jointly contribute to a fuller understanding of meaning. In the same vein, Crystal^[8] pointed out that the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is often blurred, largely due to the inherent difficulty in clearly distinguishing between the two areas.

According to Saeed^[9], a substantial portion of an utterance's meaning is embedded in its intended social function. Consequently, listeners must accurately discern whether the speaker is posing a question, issuing an invitation, or enacting another communicative act to fully grasp the utterance's meaning. Austin^[10] was the first to describe the communicative functions of language as speech acts, arguing that language is not just for stating or conveying information but also for performing actions. He outlined three parts of a speech act: the locutionary act, which is the act of producing an utterance with a specific meaning; the illocutionary act, which is the intended function behind the utterance (like giving a command or warning); and the perlocutionary act, which is the effect the utterance has on the listener/hearer, such as persuading or discouraging.

A linguistic phenomenon that has attracted significant scholarly attention across various theoretical frameworks is the use of discourse markers (DMs), which play a key role in everyday communication. Discourse markers (Schiffrin)^[11], pragmatic markers (Fraser; Brinton)^[12,13], discourse particles (Schourup; Abraham)^[14,15], pragmatic particles (Östman)^[16], pragmatic expressions (Erman)^[17], and discourse connectives (Blakemore)^[18] are some of the terms that scholars have proposed to describe these linguistic units. However, Schiffrin^[11] argues that "discourse marker" is the most suitable term, as it can encompass a wide range of linguistic items under a single conceptual umbrella. This contrasts with more restrictive terms, such as discourse connectives (e.g., so, therefore) or pragmatic expressions (e.g., you know, you see), which usually refer to specific types of linking words or multi-word expressions with limited, defined functions (Jucker and Ziv)^[19].

DMs have been defined in many ways by scholars across linguistic research. They are defined by Schiffrin^[11] (p. 31) as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk,” emphasizing their role in organizing conversation. Fraser^[20] (p. 93) viewed DMs as “lexical expressions that convey a speaker’s attitude toward the ongoing discourse or help manage the flow of conversation,” highlighting their interpersonal and interactive functions. Similarly, Aijmer^[21] (p. 4) defines DMs as “words or phrases used to signal relations between segments of discourse, guiding the listener through the speaker’s intended meaning,” underscoring their connective and coherence-establishing role.

According to Moore^[22], the pragmatic meaning of DMs is closely linked to the conceptual context in which they are said. This means that their function and interpretation are heavily influenced by the surrounding discourse and the speaker’s communicative intentions. Schiffrin^[11] further emphasized that DMs go beyond conveying mere literal content; they also perform significant pragmatic, textual, and expressive roles. Pragmatically, they help regulate the flow of conversation and establish relationships between utterances. Expressively, they convey the speaker’s attitudes, emotions, or stance. Textually, they contribute to the organization and coherence of discourse, making communication more structured and intelligible. Therefore, DMs are multifunctional elements that enhance both the clarity and richness of spoken and written language.

Building on insights from previous scholars, Brinton categorized the functions of discourse markers into two primary types: textual and interpersonal. Textual functions pertain to the structural organization of discourse and include tasks such as gaining the listener’s attention, opening or closing conversations, introducing new topics, serving as fillers or tools for turn-taking, handling discourse breakdowns, distinguishing between given and new information, and organizing the sequence of ideas. On the other hand, interpersonal functions are concerned with the social dynamics of communication. These include reinforcing mutual understanding, indicating comprehension, requesting confirmation, expressing politeness, and reacting to a speaker’s prior utterance.

Numerous studies have examined the illocutionary functions of discourse markers within the Jordanian context (e.g., Kanakri and Al Harahsheh^[23]; Al-Ghoweri^[24]; Al-

Khalidy^[25]; Al-Khawaldeh^[26]; Al-Rousan et al^[27], among others). To the researchers’ best knowledge, however, no prior study has investigated the pragmatic functions of the expression *ʕafiah* in (JSA), despite its widespread use in everyday interactions across various regions and social contexts in Jordan. This noticeable gap in the literature is particularly significant given the expression’s multifunctionality and its potential to convey a wide range of communicative intentions, including approval, surprise, disapproval, and encouragement, among others. As such, the current study seeks to fill this gap by offering a systematic and context-sensitive analysis of *ʕafiah* as a discourse marker. By doing so, it aims not only to broaden the scope of research on discourse markers in Arabic but also to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the pragmatic mechanisms at work in spoken Jordanian Arabic. This investigation is especially relevant for scholars interested in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and Arabic language pedagogy.

The present study aims to examine the pragmatic functions of one of the most frequently used discourse markers in JSA: *ʕafiah* (literally: keep your strength up; also used to mean health, well-being, or wholeness). The word *ʕafiah* is derived from the word *ʕāfiyah* (well-being), with the alif (ا) omitted for ease of pronunciation. It is a form of supplication for goodness and well-being, and it is used in the dialects of several Arabic-speaking countries. According to *the Dictionary of Colloquial Arabic Expressions*, the word *ʕafiah* is typically used to express approval or praise when someone performs an admirable action. With this aim in view, the present study seeks to address the following research question: What are the pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* in JSA?

This study will make a valuable contribution to the field of Arabic pragmatics by providing a detailed and nuanced analysis of *ʕafiah*, a frequently used yet relatively understudied (DM) in Jordanian Arabic. While *ʕafiah* plays a significant role in everyday spoken interaction, its pragmatic functions have not been systematically explored in the literature. By examining its various contextual meanings and communicative purposes, this study will deepen our understanding of how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic use language to negotiate meaning, manage interpersonal relationships, and convey subtle social cues.

Furthermore, the findings will enhance the descriptive body of knowledge on Arabic discourse markers, offering

insights that are relevant not only for theoretical linguistics but also for applied fields. In discourse analysis, the study will provide data-driven classifications that help researchers better interpret natural conversation in Arabic. In language teaching, particularly in the context of teaching Arabic as a foreign or second language, the results can inform more culturally and pragmatically appropriate instructional materials. Additionally, in intercultural communication, understanding how *ʕafiah* operates can improve cross-cultural competence by highlighting the ways in which meaning and emotion are encoded and decoded in Jordanian Arabic conversations.

2. Review of Literature

Numerous investigations have focused on analysing discourse and the pragmatic roles of various discourse markers within Jordanian Arabic. For instance, Kanakri and Al Harahsheh^[23] conducted a study to examine the various pragmatic uses of the Jordanian Arabic expression *ʕa: di* (which can be translated as “normally” or “usually”). Their findings revealed that the expression serves multiple purposes depending on the situation. Specifically, *ʕa: di* can be used to soften the impact of bad news, request permission, convey disapproval or a reprimand, express disappointment about an action, show contempt, demonstrate politeness, indicate acceptance, protect one's dignity, communicate indifference, or imply indirect criticism.

Al Harahsheh and Kanakri^[28] explored how the discourse marker *tayyib* (commonly translated as “okay” or “fine”) functions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. Their findings indicated that *Tayyib* carries a variety of pragmatic roles, such as signaling agreement or attentiveness to previous speech, urging clarification or cessation, expressing disagreement, introducing new topics, softening oppositional statements, indicating challenge or confrontation, marking the conclusion of a conversation, encouraging patience, granting approval, and serving as a conversational filler.

Al-Ghoweri^[24] explored the contextual meanings and speech acts associated with the Jordanian Arabic DM *aḡalakom Allah* (meaning ‘may God elevate you’). The study revealed that this expression is typically employed in conversations that reference animals, unclean environments, or morally unpleasant scenarios.

Al-Khalidy^[25] examined the discourse roles and prag-

matic implications of the marker *ta:lʕ* as it appears in Jordanian Arabic TV comedy shows. The analysis was based on selected YouTube videos lasting between 15 and 45 minutes. The findings showed that *ta:lʕ* conveys eight distinct contextual meanings: going, going out, becoming audible, appearing, resembling, participating, ascending, and indicating a shift to a new phase or time (“from now on”).

Al-Khawaldeh^[26] explored the various pragmatic roles of the discourse marker *wallahi*, an oath commonly used in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA). The analysis was based on a corpus of eight hours of spoken interactions, which included both in-person and mobile phone conversations. The results demonstrated that *wallahi* is a multifunctional expression, performing ten distinct functions: signaling acceptance, issuing an apology or a threat, offering a compliment, softening a request, elaborating on a point, continuing a conversation, confirming a statement, complying with a request, and functioning as a filler.

Al-Rousan et al.^[27] investigated the pragmatic roles of the DM *bas* in JSA, which translates to “but.” The 93,313 words in a corpus of 24 dyadic conversations with male and female native speakers of Jordanian Arabic included 113 occurrences of the DM *bas*. According to the study, the DM *bas* is multifunctional and has a variety of pragmatic uses in Jordanian spoken discourse, including starting a topic, signaling a change in topic, closing a turn, ending a conversation, indicating hesitancy on the speaker's part, preventing face-threatening actions, making a correction, drawing the hearer's attention, expressing restrictions and conditions, expressing disbelief and indicating a question, providing interpretation, expressing contrast, expressing regret, indicating agreement, indicating emphasis, and filling in any gaps in an exchange.

Hamdan and Abu Rumman^[29] examined the pragmatic functions of *Yahummali* in JSA. They collected a list of 50 scenarios that featured *Yahummali* based on their experience and knowledge of this DM and its associated contexts in Jordanian society. The study found that *Yahummali* serves 19 pragmatic functions: expressing dismay and disapproval, fear, condemnation, disappointment, mitigating exaggerated claims, wishing, expressing sadness, regret, dissatisfaction, shock, making threats, ridiculing, expressing anger, jealousy, desperation, surprise, sarcasm, indecisiveness, and doubt or uncertainty.

Hamdan and Hammouri^[30] examined the pragmatic

functions of the frequently used idiomatic expression *Yalla* (literally translated as “let’s”) in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA). The study involved 145 native JSA-speaking university students, both male and female, aged 18 to 22, from the University of Jordan and Jadara University, representing a range of academic disciplines. The participants were divided into three groups: 14 took part in an initial mini-questionnaire to inform the main research design; 86 completed a detailed questionnaire; and 45 participated in an acceptability judgment task. The findings identified 23 distinct illocutionary uses of *Yalla*, including: expressing agreement or acceptance, initiating action, conveying enthusiasm, making suggestions, giving commands or orders, urging someone forward, signaling compliance, marking a new stage or shift, requesting approval, offering reassurance, prompting routine behavior, giving careful advice, soothing others, offering encouragement, gaining attention, issuing reminders, expressing hope, motivating, downplaying complaints, teasing or mocking, comforting, emphasizing, and showing frustration or boredom.

Al-Hanaktah and Hamdan^[31] investigated the pragmatic uses of the expression *Tamam*—literally meaning “complete”—in Jordanian Arabic, with a focus on its usage among university students. The researchers created a digital questionnaire featuring 14 different scenarios, each linked to a specific pragmatic function previously identified in their work. This survey was shared via WhatsApp with 164 undergraduate students from the University of Jordan. Participants were asked to assess the appropriateness and acceptability of using *Tamam* in each situation. The results showed that nine functions—such as signaling approval, seeking confirmation, and conveying understanding—received agreement from at least 70% of the participants. Additionally, five more functions, including showing sarcasm or dissatisfaction, were validated by 51% to 68% of respondents.

Considering the above, the researchers assert that this study is the first to focus exclusively on exploring the pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* within the Jordanian context. As such, it addresses a notable gap in existing literature.

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 3 outlines the methodology used in the study, while Section 4 reports the main results of the present study. These results are examined and interpreted in Section 5. Lastly, Section 6

offers the conclusions along with key recommendations.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data Collection

The researchers employed Levinson's^[2] pragmatic framework to highlight and explore the diverse pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* as used in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. In this regard, Levinson's^[2] pragmatic framework provides a theoretical basis for understanding how meaning is inferred from context rather than derived solely from linguistic form. Within this framework, discourse markers are viewed as pragmatic devices that facilitate the organization of discourse, signal speaker intentions, and enhance coherence in interaction. To this effect, the researchers compiled an initial list of situations that involved *ʕafiah* in JSA. The selection was based on their familiarity with the expression and their understanding of its usage within the Jordanian context. They also identified the pragmatic (illocutionary) function that *ʕafiah* serves in each situation. The identified pragmatic functions were then validated by two Arabic language instructors, who are native speakers of JSA. The teachers were asked to review the situations to determine the validity of the proposed pragmatic function that *ʕafiah* serves in each situation. Most of their judgments were aligned with those of the researchers. Nevertheless, they pointed out that some functions were unsuitable for specific contexts and proposed better alternatives.

To determine the acceptability of these suggested pragmatic functions, 40 native speakers of JSA were asked to evaluate the suggested functions based on their own linguistic intuition. The task included a range of situations, each paired with the relevant pragmatic function. The task also featured a five-point Likert scale asking participants to evaluate each proposed pragmatic function based on their level of agreement (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Only the scenarios in which 50% or more of respondents expressed agreement (either “agree” or “strongly agree”) were selected for inclusion in the study. Such functions were considered to accurately show the current usage of *ʕafiah*. Scenarios receiving ratings of (“intermediate,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree”) were excluded from further analysis.

3.2. Participants

A sample of 40 native speakers of Jordanian Arabic (20 males and 20 females) was selected based on availability and convenience. All of them are educated, holding at least a Bachelor's degree. Their ages ranged from 25 to 50, with a mean age of 30. This age group was chosen because its members are frequently observed to use the discourse marker in question and demonstrate a high level of familiarity with, and nuanced understanding of, its functions. Participants were presented with various situational prompts, each paired with a proposed pragmatic function, and were asked to rate the acceptability of each function using a Likert scale. They were also given the opportunity to suggest alternative functions if they found the proposed ones inadequate; however,

none of the participants offered any alternative pragmatic interpretations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation by having them sign a consent form specifically designed for this study.

4. Results

The present study aims to investigate the pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* in JSA. According to the study's data, there are twelve pragmatic functions that *ʕafiah* fulfills in JSA. The pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* that were agreed upon by at least 50% of participants are displayed in the following **Table 1**. Additionally, it provides information on the proportion of participants who support each function.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Participants Endorsing Suggested Pragmatic Functions of *ʕafiah*.

Scenario No.	Function	No.	Acceptability Judgment [%]
1	Expressing praise	38	95%
2	Expressing happiness	37	92.5%
3	Expressing approval	36	90%
4	Expressing appreciation	36	90%
5	Expressing mockery or ridicule	36	90%
6	Expressing disapproval	34	85%
7	Expressing surprise	34	85%
8	Expressing anger	30	75%
9	Expressing frustration	25	62.5%
10	Expressing annoyance	24	60%
11	Expressing condemnation	22	55%
12	Expressing surrender	22	55%

Below, each illocutionary function of *ʕafiah* is listed in descending order, along with a descriptive example. To boost clarity and readability, every example is given first in Arabic, then its transliteration, and finally a literal translation.

(1) Expressing Praise

(Context) When Khaled heard that the Jordanian team had qualified for the World Cup finals, he said to his friend, Ali:

منتخبنا تأهل لكأس العالم

muntakhabnā ta'ahhal li-Kās al-'ālam

Our team qualified for the World Cup

عفياً، عليهم اشي برفع الراس. علي

ʕafiah ʕalayhum ishi birfaʕ ir-rās.

Ali: ʕafiah, it is something that makes you proud.

ʕafiah can be used to express praise for someone's achievement or effort. In this context, the speaker, Ali, uses

ʕafiah to praise the Jordanian Football Team for their qualification for the World Cup finals.

(2) Expressing Happiness

(Context) Maher told Saddam that the government plans to reduce oil prices next month. Saddam smiled broadly and said:

عفياً، هاي الاخبار الحلوة

ʕafiah, hāy il-akhbār il-ḥilweh

ʕafiah! That is the kind of news we like to hear.

Another pragmatic function of *ʕafiah* is to express happiness or pleasure. In the example above, the speaker uses *ʕafiah* to convey his delight upon hearing that the government intends to reduce oil prices. This expression serves as a positive response to the news.

(3) Expressing Approval

(Context) When the father saw his son helping an old

woman to carry her stuff, he said to him:

عفية، هذا الصح.
 ʕafiah hādḥā aṣ-ṣaḥḥ
 ʕafiah, this is right.

In this context, *ʕafiah* appears to be used to express approval. The speaker, the father, uses *ʕafiah* to express his approval of his son's kind behavior.

(4) Expressing Appreciation

(Context) During one of the lectures, while the professor was taking attendance and called out Reem's name, Samia raised her hand on behalf of her absent friend. When Reem found out, she said to Samia:

عفية عليك، ما انساها الك.
 ʕafiah ʕalayki, ma nansāha elik
 ʕafiah, I will not forget that for you.

In this context, *ʕafiah* is used to express appreciation. Reem says *ʕafiah* to show her gratitude toward Samia for the thoughtful gesture of marking her as present during her absence. Thus, the pragmatic function of *ʕafiah* here is to express appreciation.

(5) Expressing Mockery or Ridicule

(Context) Salameh lost the card game three times in a row, so his friend Khalid said to him:

عفية (مع ابتسامة) هاي عاتك.
 ʕafiah hāy ʕātek
 ʕafiah (said with a smile), this is your habit.

ʕafiah is used here to mock or ridicule someone for something, as Khalid utilizes *ʕafiah* to ridicule his friend, Salameh, for losing a card game three times consecutively. The smile reinforces the mocking function of *ʕafiah* in this context.

(6) Expressing Disapproval

(Context) When Mariam asked her mother to let her travel with her friends to Dubai, her mother replied:

عفية، هذا الي ناقص.
 ʕafiah hādḥā illī nāqiṣ
 ʕafiah, this is just what was missing.

In this context, *ʕafiah* is used to express disapproval. It is used when someone is faced with an unreasonable or inappropriate request and wants to emphasize how unacceptable or absurd they consider it. Here, the mother considers her daughter's request to travel to Dubai with friends as inappropriate, and she uses *ʕafiah* to signal her disapproval.

(7) Expressing Surprise

(Context) Mohammad told his friend, Mahmoud, that their neighbor Khaled had sold his car and house and had suddenly disappeared. Mahmoud answered:

عفية! فكرك ليش؟
 ʕafiah! fakkarak liṣḥ
 ʕafiah! Why do you think?

ʕafiah can be used to express surprise. This pragmatic usage occurs when an unexpected event is entirely surprising to someone. In the context above, Mahmoud employs *ʕafiah* to indicate his astonishment at Khaled suddenly selling off all of his possessions and disappearing.

(8) Expressing Anger

(Context) Ahmad comes home late at night without informing anyone, and his phone is off. So. As a result, his father says to him:

عفية (قيلت مع تقطيب الحاجبين وهز الرأس)، هيك بتروح وبتطفي تلفونك؟! احترق دمنا عليك.
 ʕafiah heik bitrūḥ u-btiṭfi telefōnak?! Iḥtaraq damnā ʕalēk?

ʕafiah (said with furrowed brows and a head shake), so you go out and turn off your phone? We were burning with worry over you!

Here, the father uses *ʕafiah* to convey his anger toward his son due to his irresponsible behavior. Thus, *ʕafiah* is used here to show anger. The furrowed brows and head shake further reinforce the anger conveyed by *ʕafiah*.

(9) Expressing Frustration

(Context) The teacher told his students that the exam would cover five units instead of three. One of his students commented:

عفية، هيك كثير.
 ʕafiah haik kathīr.
 ʕafiah, this is too much.

Another pragmatic function that *ʕafiah* serves is to express frustration about something. As noted in this example, *ʕafiah* is used to express the student's frustration and sense of being overwhelmed by the unexpected increase in exam material.

(10) Expressing Annoyance

(Context) When Mona, who was preparing for her final exams, found out that her sister and her five children wanted to visit her, she said:

عفية، الا هل فترة هاي لا.
 ʕafiah illā hal-fatrah hāy lā

ʕafiah, come on, not during this time.

ʕafiah can be employed to express annoyance. In this context, the speaker, Mona, uses *ʕafiah* upon hearing that her sister and her five children wanted to visit while she was preparing for her final exams, in order to express her annoyance. Thus, the illocutionary function of *ʕafiah* here is to express annoyance.

(11) Expressing Condemnation

(Context) The government announced that there would be no salary increases for employees this year. The following conversation took place between Ahmed and Ali.

أحمد: الحكومة قررت انه ما في زيادة رواتب.

Al-ḥukūmah qararat innu mā fī zīyādat rawātib

Ahmad: The government decided that there will be no salary increases.

علي: عفية، عن جد هذا ظلم.

ʕafiah ‘an jid, hādha ḡulm.

Ali: ʕafiah seriously, that is really unfair.

The word *ʕafiah* is used to express condemnation in response to something perceived as negative or irritating. In this example, Ali uses *ʕafiah* to introduce his harsh criticism of the government's decision not to increase salaries this year.

(12) Expressing Surrender

(Context) Sami told Mazen that the ministry had raised the passing grade from 50 to 70. Mazen answered:

مازن: عفية، هيك ضاقت.

ʕafiah haik ḡāʕat

Mazen: ʕafiah, things have really tightened.

The word *ʕafiah* can be utilized to express surrender. As the context suggests, *ʕafiah* is used to express a sense of surrender. Mazen uses *ʕafiah* to express his feelings of hopelessness or defeat in response to the raised passing grade. This reflects his acceptance of a challenging situation where success seems unlikely, signaling that he is giving up or feels powerless.

5. Discussion

As mentioned previously, the researchers employed Levinson's pragmatic framework to highlight and explore the diverse pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* as used in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. The data analysis revealed that *ʕafiah* is pragmatically multifunctional in JSA because it is used to accomplish twelve distinct pragmatic functions. Among these,

four are positive, expressing praise, happiness, approval, and appreciation, while the remaining eight are negative, encompassing mockery or ridicule, disapproval, surprise, anger, frustration, annoyance, condemnation, and surrender. Clearly, *ʕafiah* functions as a pragmatically versatile discourse marker, with a predominant tendency to convey negative meanings over positive ones.

Table 1 demonstrates that most of the suggested pragmatic functions (i.e., 8 out of 12) were accepted by 70 percent or more of participants. These include expressing praise, happiness, approval, appreciation, mockery or ridicule, disapproval, surprise, and anger. However, only a relatively small percentage of participants agreed on four specific functions: expressing frustration, annoyance, condemnation, and surrender. Interestingly, none of the proposed functions received less than 50 percent endorsement from participants. Additionally, no alternative functions were suggested by participants beyond those identified by the researchers, indicating that the proposed set of functions is likely comprehensive. These findings lend support to the assertion that *ʕafiah* functions as a well-established discourse marker in JSA.

In certain contexts, *ʕafiah* is often accompanied by non-verbal cues that help convey its precise pragmatic functions. Such cues help reinforce and clarify the intended meaning of the utterance. For example, in Example 5, the speaker used *ʕafiah* accompanied by a smile, which complemented the verbal expression of mockery or ridicule. Here, the smile plays an essential role in signaling the speaker's sarcastic or mocking intent, thereby enhancing the overall communicative effect of *ʕafiah*.

An additional nonverbal cue involves the use of furrowed brows and a head shake with *ʕafiah* to signal anger. For instance, in Example 8, the speaker's use of *ʕafiah* expresses his anger toward his son's irresponsible behavior. The combination of furrowed brows and a head shake reinforces the anger-related function of *ʕafiah* in this context, helping listeners interpret the speaker's emotional stance clearly.

These findings can be further contextualized by comparing them to previous studies on similar discourse markers in Jordanian Arabic. The results of this study align with previous research highlighting the multifunctionality of discourse markers in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA). For instance, similar to the multifunctional uses of expressions like *tayyib* (Kanakri and Al-Harashsheh)^[23], *wallahi* (Al-Khawaldeh)^[26],

and *yahummalali* (Hamdan and Abu Rumman)^[29], the discourse marker *ʕafiah* was found to serve diverse pragmatic functions, ranging from positive functions such as praise and appreciation to more negative ones such as condemnation and frustration. These findings support Brinton's and Schiffirin's assertion that discourse markers are inherently multifunctional and context-sensitive, reflecting speaker attitudes and interactional dynamics.

Moreover, the predominance of negatively valenced uses of *ʕafiah* resonates with Al-Ghoweri's^[24] findings regarding *aḡalakom Allah*, which is also more commonly used in emotionally charged or morally evaluative contexts. The integration of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or intonation patterns, further substantiates Bavelas and Chovil's^[32] claim that facial gestures often reinforce the pragmatic force of discourse markers. Thus, the current study not only expands the descriptive inventory of DMs in JSA but also reinforces theoretical claims about their pragmatic richness and sociolinguistic embeddedness in Arabic discourse.

The findings of this study also hold pedagogical value, particularly in the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign or second language. Mastering DM like *ʕafiah* can significantly enhance learners' communicative competence by equipping them to navigate real-life conversations more naturally and appropriately. Since *ʕafiah* often conveys nuanced emotional or social meanings—ranging from approval and happiness to sarcasm and condemnation—it can serve as an excellent case study in pragmatic instruction. Teachers could incorporate context-based dialogues, role-plays, and multimedia resources to help learners grasp the subtleties of such expressions. Additionally, explaining how non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, tone, body language) interact with discourse markers would promote deeper cross-cultural understanding and pragmatic awareness, two essential components of effective language acquisition.

In closing, we emphasize that considerable effort was invested in eliciting, identifying, and validating the pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah*. However, we recognize that the classifications we propose may not be universally accepted, whether by native Jordanian Arabic speakers or by scholars in the field. A certain level of subjectivity has inevitably shaped both our analysis and interpretation. Complete agree-

ment on these matters is improbable. Each reexamination of these functions might yield alternative labels or interpretations that are just as valid. Such variability in interpretation is an inherent and expected aspect of linguistic research and should be approached with openness and understanding by readers and reviewers.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides an in-depth examination of the pragmatic (illocutionary) functions of the discourse marker *ʕafiah*, a frequently used expression in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. The findings revealed that this discourse marker implements an array of pragmatic functions in JSA. These functions include expressing various emotions or attitudes: praise, happiness, approval, appreciation, mockery, disapproval, surprise, anger, frustration, annoyance, condemnation, and surrender. The study further shows that *ʕafiah* functions as a pragmatically versatile discourse marker, predominantly conveying negative rather than positive pragmatic functions. The study concludes that context is essential in shaping and reshaping the illocutionary functions linked to the discourse marker *ʕafiah*.

Future research may benefit from identifying and examining additional pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* as they manifest in a broader array of communicative contexts. This is particularly relevant because *ʕafiah* is widely recognized as a frequently used expression among Jordanians across various domains not investigated in this study, such as folk songs, television shows, and social media content.

Future studies could also investigate the pragmatic functions of *ʕafiah* across various Arabic dialects (e.g., Syrian, Iraqi, Saudi, among others) to identify similarities and differences in its usage within regional varieties. Furthermore, research may focus on the role of non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, tone, and gestures that accompany *ʕafiah* to better understand how these elements shape or reinforce its pragmatic functions in real-life communicative contexts. Finally, the results may offer insights for Arabic language pedagogy, particularly in the domains of pragmatics and discourse analysis, by demonstrating how native expressions can convey meanings in different social contexts.

Author Contributions

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The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions. Access to the data may be granted upon reasonable request and with approval from the relevant institutional ethics board.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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